



Number 1

THE INDIANS VERSUS THE TEXTBOOKS: IS THERE ANY WAY OUT?

BY

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It is probably fitting that in 1984 another essay on American history textbook portrayals of Indians is not news. The fires of righteous indignation that fueled earlier exposés are burning low among professional historians, the political mood of the country has shifted dramatically away from minority concerns, and commentators increasingly are attracted by new questions and trendier groups.

It is possible, of course, that the academy seems indifferent to the treatment of Native Americans in college texts because the problems of the past have been corrected. In 1968 Virgil Vogel conducted an extensive review of Indians in textbooks.<sup>1</sup> His essay found the role of Native Americans in our history was either obliterated, distorted or disparaged. Writing in The Atlantic a few years later, Alvin Josephy reached similar conclusions.<sup>2</sup> My review has been modest. I have examined the thirteen U.S. history textbooks advertised in last winter's issues of The American Historical Review and The Journal of American History, since ordering for the fall usually occurs during winter and spring.<sup>3</sup> All of the books were either published or revised in the past three years. I hoped my sample would be representative of college level material and would give me a picture of how Indians are being portrayed in contemporary classrooms and lecture halls. I discovered that despite the changes and improvements of the past fifteen years, many of the distortions and inaccuracies referred to by Vogel and Josephy persist.

Modern textbooks come in a variety of formats and styles, but all have a common didactic quality. They are, after all, written for

students. And their tone corresponds to a view of our society that is positive, satisfied and secure. Non-Indian people generally view Indian history as tragic. Because the narrative of dispossession is both negative in tone and troubling in content, authors have great difficulty shaping the Native American experience to fit the upbeat format of their books. Efforts to revise and improve textbooks might well be doomed by our collective unwillingness to sit still for bad news. Nevertheless, style alone cannot account for the persistence of inadequate treatment of Indians.

My sample indicates that textbook authors simply ignore new information. This is particularly true when that information threatens cherished preconceptions about the American past. It is easier to add a brief biography of Geronimo to a chapter on the West than to surrender our self-image as tamers of the wilderness or settlers in a virgin land. Such chauvinistic nostalgia may explain why textbook authors do not seem very curious about recent scholarship. The controversy surrounding the population of North America in 1492 is a prominent case in point.

During the 1970s the work of Henry Dobyns, William Deneven, Douglas Ubelaker, Russell Thornton and others presented a new and unsettling view of early contact between Europeans and Native North Americans. Their scholarship demolished an earlier belief that in 1492 one million native people inhabited the land that is now the United States. That one million figure appeared sixty years ago in an estimate compiled by anthropologist James Mooney and published after his death. Mooney based his count on written sources, meticulously collecting and collating the earliest accounts of actual contact:

between Europeans and every native group in North America. He inferred a population figure from each written account and produced his overall figure by totaling the list. Scholars today do not question Mooney's careful tabulations, but they recognize that European diseases ran far ahead of white explorers. There is mounting evidence that the epidemics unleashed by European contact with the previously isolated American biosphere produced the greatest demographic catastrophe in human history. Virgin soil epidemics broke out almost as soon as the Europeans landed, setting waves of smallpox, influenza, and other infectious diseases rolling across the land.<sup>4</sup>

There continues to be a lively debate over the precise size of the precontact population of North America, but there is now no question that the old one million figure is so far off that it conveys an inaccurate picture of Indian life in the fifteenth century. One million people might be "scattered," "wandering" across the landscape; four million or six million or eighteen million require a more sophisticated set of social arrangements and a more powerful technology. In setting aside Mooney's old figure, one must also set aside the notion that America was an empty land, sprinkled lightly with aimless nomads.

But such ideas die hard. Perhaps that is why three of the thirteen texts examined continue to promote the one million figure. American History, A Survey, by Richard Current, the late T. Harry Williams, Frank Freidel and Alan Brinkley, first appeared in 1959. It should probably not be surprising then that the 1983 edition (number six) repeats earlier assertions that "only about a million people resided in North America" on the eve of Columbus's voyage.<sup>5</sup> In the

same vein it is probably to be expected that the 7th edition of Thomas A. Bailey's The American Pageant (now coauthored with David Kennedy) would repeat the one million error.<sup>6</sup> But social historian Stephen Thernstrom's brand new text seems a bit out of place in such old-fashioned company.

Thernstrom writes in his preface that "the central question to ask about American history is who are the American people and how did they come to be that way" and he assures us that he has drawn upon the most "recent literature" for a "fresh overview of the contours of American history."<sup>7</sup> A wonderful and ambitious way to launch a text, but when it comes to understanding precontact Indian populations, Thernstrom's ship runs aground at dockside. Despite his observation that scholars place the population of the Western Hemisphere at between 14 and 100 million, Thernstrom says nothing specific about North America. He gives his diligent readers a hint, however, by referring them in a rare footnote to the Atlas of World Population History, published in Britain in 1978. The book's authors, he says, "judiciously review the wildly conflicting estimates" of population.<sup>8</sup> When it comes to precontact North America, this "judicious review" consumes a single sentence. Not only is the coverage of the question scant, but the author's one sentence contains a bumper crop of uninformed and pejorative assertions. Colin McEvedy and Richard Jones write that the one million figure for North America "goes back at least as far as J. Mooney" and add (here's the review) that Mooney "seems to be generally accepted, though the California school of revisionists has issued a trial balloon in favor of 20m[sic]."<sup>9</sup> In proper, old world fashion the authors imply that Mooney's figures are

correct because they have been around for sixty years. And like Republicans squawking about "San Francisco Democrats," the "California School" remains unidentified, convicted in absentia. It is enough for an idea to be associated with Pacific kooks--it simply can't be true. So much for recent scholarship.

Close on the heels of the three who continue in the thrall of Mooney's sixty-year-old estimates are two other authors who peg the population fifty percent higher. Both Maldwyn Jones in his 1983 volume, The Limits of Liberty, and the 1983 abbreviation and revision of Morrison, Commager and Leuchtenberg's History of the American Republic use this figure of 1.5 million. Unfortunately, neither explains why.<sup>10</sup>

The only authors to use the newer, higher estimates are Arthur Link and his colleagues in the 1984 edition of A Concise History of the American People. These men state flatly (and probably unwisely) that "10,000,000 to 12,000,000 lived north of the Rio Grande."<sup>11</sup> They do not explain why they are so sure, but it is significant that Link et al turn almost immediately from population to a discussion of the nature of tribal societies and their relationship to European civilization. They conclude on a refreshing note:

The pre-Columbian world, which the Europeans altered forever in 1492, was one inhabited by many different peoples sometimes in conflict with each other and sometimes living together in peace. It was a world with many histories and cultures all its own. The nature of those histories and cultures all influenced the character of the new societies which the Europeans attempted to create and the speed with

which they were established. In sum, the "new" world was a world neither more or less civilized than Europe. It was only different.<sup>12</sup>

In all of the texts there is a relationship between population estimates and descriptions of Indian people. Link's text makes a strong case for cross-cultural sensitivity because the population figures demand some recognition of the scale and complexity of native societies. Those at the other end of the spectrum generate an opposite view.

Thomas Bailey's seven-edition grip on Mooney's estimate could well be linked to his affection for the images that a small population figure conjures before him. "Most native settlements," he writes, "were small, scattered and often impermanent. So thinly spread across the land was the North American Indian population that large areas were virtually uninhabited, with whispering primeval forests and sparkling, virgin waters."<sup>13</sup> Richard Current and his colleagues also love the idea that America was once a kind of national park. "The friendly forest--so green and beautiful, so rich in materials for food and shelter and manufactures of all kinds--also had its uninviting and even hostile aspects. In its shadows," Current writes, "lurked the wolves and panthers that devoured the settlers' livestock. In it too lived native tribes who, although at times helpful and welcoming to the newcomers, at other times were hostile and threatening."<sup>14</sup>

Thernstrom sticks to technology. "Aztec and Inca agriculture," he announces, "were at about the level that had developed in the Near East by 2000 BC, and they supported similar population densities." Thernstrom, however, cannot leave out an obvious qualifier that

renders his original statement useless--"(if the conservative population estimates are correct)."<sup>15</sup> Thernstrom makes one other unfortunate assertion about technology. The Indians, he notes, "had no plows to break the soil and their largest domesticated animal (except for the Incas' llamas) was the dog."<sup>16</sup> There were no draft animals in the Western Hemisphere prior to 1492. That Indians should be relegated to the stone age because of this fact is absurd, and that a skilled historian should fail to grasp the extraordinary achievements of native agriculture is cause for some alarm.

A discussion of population estimates could consume an entire essay. The issue is not settled and there is little agreement among specialists beyond a recognition that Mooney's methods are no longer useful. What is relevant to a discussion of textbooks and Indians is the sad fact that nearly two decades after Vogel's original study, five of the thirteen books under review still cling to an outdated population figure and perpetrate gross, even racist generalizations about native societies on the eve of Columbus's voyage. Only one book explicitly recognizes the new scholarship in its narrative. The remaining seven books do not give an exact figure for North America, relying instead on vague references either to "many people," or "sparse populations." Robert Divine et al's America Past and Present and A People and A Nation, by Mary Beth Norton and five colleagues, hint at high figures by discussing both Indian agriculture and the impact of disease, but the remaining five texts could probably accept John Garraty's assertion that America was "almost uninhabited" in 1492.<sup>17</sup>



Mistakes such as these continue to appear in texts, and they suggest a depressing conclusion: things haven't changed very much. Perhaps we should reprint Vogel and Josephy and be done with it. But this state of affairs also suggests a set of difficult questions. Why does this situation of ignorance, misrepresentation or apathy persist? Is there any way out of it? Why do we--as teachers and historians--appear to accept the situation? There are two answers to the last question: it's us or it's them. "Them," are the publishers, editors, school boards and college administrators who seem to control the textbook industry. "They" reprint Bailey's whispering forest seven times, "they" accept Thernstrom's straw footnotes, "they" won't listen to new ideas and interpretations.

Attacks on publishers and authors might be justified, but they have so far proven ineffective. The persistence of inadequate and inaccurate treatments of Indians suggests deeper causes and more complex solutions.<sup>18</sup> Producing accurate, sensitive, and comprehensive textbook portrayals of Native Americans raises a series of problems for authors and teachers, problems that are both narrowly historical and broadly conceptual. Addressing and resolving these issues requires far more than firing another salvo at American history textbooks. How much more will be clear once we understand better the problems associated with integrating Indian materials into the U.S. history narrative. What follows is a preliminary listing of those problems and some suggestions for resolving them.

### Prehistory

The first problem, suggested already by the discussion of precontact population figures, is the subject of Indian "prehistory." "Prehistory" is a misnomer because it suggests there was no history before there were written records. I use it here simply to refer to Native American history before 1492. The problem of this precontact history can be reduced to a simple question: "where to start?" Most textbooks say something about who the Indians were and where they came from in their first chapters, but none of the books under review have developed a way to address the scale and complexity of precontact native societies.

The Great Republic by Bernard Bailyn and five distinguished colleagues takes the simplest and worst approach; they ignore the subject altogether. "The United States," the authors announce on page one, "evolved from the British settlements on the mainland of North America, first permanently established in 1607."<sup>19</sup> As a result, their narrative proceeds without a description of native cultures prior to 1492. Three other authors dismiss the subject in a page. Maldwyn Jones observes that following their arrival in 30,000 BC, the first Americans "fanned out across the ... Americas," thereby suggesting the advance of a vast guerilla battalion stalking the woods for nuts and berries.<sup>20</sup> Joseph Conlin in The American Past announces "twenty-five thousand or more years ago a band of Stone Age people crossed the Bering Strait...." A few more sentences on dispersion wraps up the subject; by the bottom of page one it is 1492.<sup>21</sup> And Thomas Bailey, still enthralled by his "whispering primeval forest," devotes only a

few paragraphs to the people who he says arrived 10 to 20,000 years ago and "roamed slowly southward as far as South America."<sup>22</sup>

The authors who devote significant attention to the subject probably envy those who ignore it. How can one say something meaningful about 20,000 years of history? How can an author describe the evolution of several hundred language and cultural groups? One approach is to refer to the early arrivals as immigrants or discoverers. Stephen Thernstrom argues that "in a sense, the Indians were immigrants too."<sup>23</sup> Mary Beth Norton alters the term slightly by calling them "migrants."<sup>24</sup> While technically accurate, juxtaposing these assertions with the statement that "human beings were not native to the Americas," suggests that Indians are recent arrivals.<sup>25</sup> The effect is to reduce Indian people to the level of European immigrants, folks who had no more claim to the land than our immigrant grandparents when they were fresh off the boat.

Another tactic for describing the precontact setting is to print a map of North American Indian tribes alongside the text describing native cultures. Six of the books reviewed print such maps; none of the maps is accurate. All of the maps present locations for tribes taken from standard anthropology texts. A laudable effort, but most of those maps present the location of tribes in the nineteenth century. Thus America Past and Present contains a beautiful map entitled "Major Indian Tribes and Culture Areas in North America, 1500" that has the Crow on the Missouri River (they didn't exist as a separate unit until the eighteenth century), the Sioux in the Dakotas (they spent the sixteenth century farming in Minnesota), the Shawnee south of the Ohio River (they were also north), and the Delawares on

the coast of Maryland (they were not identified by that name in 1500).<sup>26</sup> Other maps repeat these errors, creating a powerful but inaccurate image of Indian tribes as static nation states. A doubly unfortunate aspect of this practice is that the maps often contradict or confuse the message of the text. Arthur Link's discussion of the native past, for example, is brief but well done. He writes that Columbus's voyage did not link the old world with the new, rather "it represented the first contact between two worlds which were both old."<sup>27</sup> Nevertheless, by reprinting the nineteenth-century locations of North American tribes (this one labeled, "Indian Tribes in the 17th Century") he tells us nothing that would give substance to his generalities.<sup>28</sup> Students with maps in their head showing the expansion and contraction of the Roman empire or the shifting political boundaries of Europe see a single map of North America covered with tiny, unmoving, inaccurate names. The most confusing presentation appears in The Pursuit of Liberty. Here the standard map (now labeled "The First Americans") accompanies the authors' assertions that North America was divided into three zones of culture (farming, mixed farming and hunting, and hunting). Aside from the fact that the three-zone notion is inadequate--it ignores the Upper Great Lakes, the Great Basin, California and the fishing societies of the Pacific Northwest--it bears no relationship to the seven culture areas marked in bold letters on the adjacent map.<sup>29</sup>

In the body of the textbook descriptions of precontact native history, several themes emerge. First, in addition to the scarcity of information and the confusion of precontact and postcontact cultures, there is a glaring absence of accurate information comparing Eurasia

and the Americas. For example, chapter one of Current, Williams, Freidel and Brinkley's text begins with this remarkable statement:

For thousands of centuries—centuries in which human races were evolving, forming communities, and building the beginnings of national civilizations in Africa, Asia and Europe--the continents we know as the Americas stood empty of mankind and its works."<sup>30</sup>

This is fantasy. The dispersal of the human species from Africa took hundreds of millenia. When evidence of early people is mapped globally, the arrival of those "first immigrants" in the Americas in about 30,000 BC fits with data gathered from sites in northern China and the Soviet Union. The peopling of the Americas was part of a vast process of human migration and dispersal. The Western Hemisphere was no more "empty" than Japan or Manchuria. The authors' reference to "the beginning of national civilizations" taking place while the Americas stood empty is also misleading, not only because the phrase has no meaning in a prehistoric context, but also because it says nothing about events in the rest of the world. Britain, for example, did not exist as a physical entity until about 6,000 BC. As in the Bering Straits, the lowering of the sea level during the glacial period created a land bridge linking Dover to Calais. When glaciers receded and the English channel was finally formed (about 5500 BC), agricultural communities already existed in Mexico. Comparing civilizations in the Americas and with those elsewhere in the globe indicate to me that Bailyn's precious England might more accurately be termed "empty of mankind and its works" than North America. Finally,

Current's inference that the Americas were somehow missing out on great events taking place elsewhere indicates that he and his coauthors have not studied the most important of those events--the development of agriculture and agricultural settlements.<sup>31</sup>

Modern archaeology traces the cultivation of domesticated crops in the Middle East from 8000 to 6000 BC. By 5000 BC early agricultural settlements were evident in eastern and central Europe. Farming reached the British Isles about 3500 BC, although intensive agriculture did not begin there until about the time of Jesus. This process is strikingly similar to the one that was unfolding at the same time in the New World. Farmers in central Mexico first domesticated corn about 6000 BC and transmitted their techniques north and south. The earliest evidence of domesticated plants in North America has been discovered in Kentucky and Tennessee where squash plants date from 2500 BC. Intensive farming came later, however; corn entered the southwestern U.S. in 1000 BC and reached the East Coast at about 0 AD.

There does not appear to be any reason to describe Native American history in the precontact era as particularly unusual or backward. Certainly the Americas were different from Eurasia, but their history over the 10,000 years preceding Columbus's voyage is best understood as part of a global process of adaptation to the warmer postglacial environment. In the postglacial era, people began exploiting primary food resources such as seeds, shellfish and small game. The warmer climate supported these efforts and agriculture emerged in a series of isolated habitats in Mexico, the Middle East, China and Southeast Asia. Farming techniques radiated from these

separate habitats over succeeding millenia. Thus "the effect of recent research," Cambridge archaeologist Andrew Sherratt wrote in 1980, "has been to dissolve the neat conventional divisions, to emphasize the continuous thread running through the whole process of man's development and to acknowledge that while each phase manifests revolutionary possibilities, the transitions that separate them are phases of accelerated change rather than sharply delineated boundaries."<sup>32</sup>

Accompanying references to backward continents are references to backward people. Morrison, Commager and Leuchtenberg, for example, begin their text with an extended imaginary description of the Bering Straits "immigrants." The authors tell us that the hardy group had been travelling for years, "fighting the natives along the way. ... Only the magic of their medicine man" kept them going. They were, we learn, "a tough looking lot, even according to Siberian standards of that unrefined era." They were being pursued so they made rafts or (the authors add) "more likely" they stole a nearby kayak. A few paragraphs later we learn that no travellers reached North America before the Norseman. There may have been a Chinese junk shipwrecked in Oregon, the authors admit, "but the human survivors, if any, were undoubtedly killed and probably eaten."<sup>33</sup> Such fantasies--totally without an evidentiary base--tell us far more about the authors' perceptions of nonwhite people than they do about the past.

John Garraty's text takes a similar approach. He lists the traits all Indians held in common. First, "being human." they "suffered from all human feelings in one form or another." They were also "terrible male chauvinists," cruel in war, communal in land

holding, and "they preferred a slow-paced, even existence." Mean but laid back.<sup>34</sup>

All of the authors concentrate on what the Indian lacked (writing, guns, horses) and pay little attention to what they had--technology, agriculture, religious systems, social structures and economic relationships. The fullness and complexity of precontact tribal life does not appear in the textbook descriptions under review.

Even if one could set aside or correct every inaccuracy, the textbook treatment of precontact Indian history would still be inadequate. The subject cannot simply be tossed off in a few maps or casual generalizations about the nature of "Indian" life. Nor is the Bailyn solution satisfactory. While the national political system surely derived from British antecedents, law and government in states and localities have a much more diverse heritage. And the society inhabiting the political system is both diverse and unique. There is a social history of the U.S. that is at least as important and interesting as our political history. Moreover--especially in the first years of contact and European settlement--the Indian component of that social history had a significant impact on political life. The precontact history of Indian communities is such a vast subject that textbooks simply must devote more time to it. Without a fuller and more sophisticated view of the precontact era, all the correctives to follow are worthless; they are but cosmetics on a corpse.

#### Coherence

The second problem textbook authors face is presenting Indian people as coherent historical actors. The task might be reduced to answering a simple question: What motivated the Indians? Textbooks



are constitutionally uncomfortable with questions of this kind because their narratives speak to us from the center of the majority culture. Their assignment is to explain the past to students, to show (as many advertisements promise) how "we" got where we are today. The books all end in a relatively comfortable present.

Textbook authors have difficulty with people who stand outside the complex, urban environment of the late twentieth century and whose history is often a challenge this society's claims to greatness. To spend scholarly energy and precious pages on the internal workings of a tiny minority community seems unwise. As a result, authors either ignore Indian motives completely, or Native Americans appear in the narrative as irrational primitives who cling tenaciously to a doomed way of life. Both views separate the Indians' experience from the rest of U.S. history and limit the Indians' role to that of perpetual antagonist. Indians in textbooks either do nothing or they resist. Several examples from different sections of the texts can illustrate this point.

Ironically, the area of Indian motivation that is probably most overlooked in the texts is one that has received some of the most intense scholarly attention during the past decade: the North American fur trade. The exchange of European manufactures for hides and furs began with earliest contact and occurred in every part of North America. The fur trade involved more Indians and whites over a longer period than any other activity, including warfare. A rich literature has examined the economic, social and religious aspects of this phenomenon in many parts of what is now the United States, yet very few textbooks discuss or describe the trade.<sup>35</sup>

Stephan Thernstrom tells us that New Netherlands became a place for "obtaining fur from the Indians" and Richard Current describes "the lure of the forest and its furs", but neither tells us about the industry that grew up in the woods to find, process, transport and market the precious commodity or about the trade's many complex consequences.<sup>36</sup> In the same way, Thomas Bailey notes that the fur trade "jerked [Indians] from the stone age to the iron age almost overnight," but does not tell us how or why this leap occurred.<sup>37</sup> A diligent reader of Griggs and McCandless's The Course of American History could probably come away from his or her labors without knowing that Indians were involved in the trade at all.<sup>38</sup> Some authors such as Morrison and Joseph Conlin mention the important role of the Iroquois Indians in trading, but the majority focus exclusively on Europeans and ignore the many ways in which the fur trade built economic, familial and political ties between the races.<sup>39</sup> Maldwyn Jones is perhaps the most extreme of these when he describes the underlying cause of the Pequot war as the clash of "incompatible economic systems."<sup>40</sup> While New England in the mid-seventeenth century might be an example of incompatible systems of land use, the fifty years or more of trade preceding the Pequot war would seem to disprove Jones's assertion.

The fur trade and the cross-cultural relationships that came with it were factors in every colony's history. More important, the fur trade set off a chain reaction of change within the Indian world. The trade introduced European tools and utensils to native people in advance of European settlement. These goods in turn stimulated a variety of new needs and created a range of opportunities for Indians.

These needs and opportunities subsequently became important factors in the Indians' social and political life. As a consequence, the tribesmen who met Thomas Hooker in Connecticut or William Penn in Philadelphia or James Ogelthorpe in Georgia already had felt the impact of the European presence. To say, as Bernard Bailyn and his coauthors do, that "The European settlement of North America was an intrusion into the wilderness" is thus to simplify and misrepresent the reality of early contact.<sup>41</sup>

Two books acknowledge the significance of the fur trade. Mary Beth Norton and her colleagues explain why steel tools were so important to eastern tribes, and point out that the Iroquois confederacy was a principal beneficiary of early trade. In addition, they note that the trade meant that "there was no clearly defined frontier: white settlements and Indian villages were often located near each other...."<sup>42</sup> Joseph Conlin also acknowledges that New York was prosperous "thanks to a flourishing trade in furs and deerskins with the Iroquois Indians."<sup>43</sup> Conlin goes on to describe the nature of tribal economies so that students would be able at least to imagine the impact of the fur trade on Iroquois political life.

But even with two modest textbook presentations of this one topic, the problem of conveying a coherent view of Indian motivation and behavior persists. How did involvement in the fur trade alter Iroquois or Cherokee or Micmac culture? What were the consequences of fur trade "prosperity" for both the trading tribes and their neighbors? Why were Indians so eager to trade? To give students a sense of the native perception of the fur trade is praiseworthy, but none of the books present a picture of the relationship of this one

aspect of tribal life to others or describe how the trade affected intertribal relations.

Descriptions of the first English settlement at Jamestown repeat the tendency either to ignore Indian motivation or to define it quite narrowly. The Powhatan Indians who lived along the Chesapeake tidewater were aware of the power of European technology and the danger of contact with whites long before John Smith landed in 1607. They had probably heard of the Roanoke colony and they certainly recalled their own violent encounter with Spanish missionaries in the sixteenth century. Reactions to the arrival of English settlers were further complicated by the Indians' desire to expand the influence of their confederacy. All the famous events of early Jamestown (the uneasy truce, John Smith's "rescue," the food trade, the 1622 uprising) must be seen against this background of Indian ambition and fear. In addition, that ambition and fear existed in a society whose political and religious systems differed fundamentally from those of the Europeans.

Probably the worst account of the 1622 uprising appears in the 1983 edition of Current et al's American History: A Survey. Claiming that Jamestown "was soon threatened by hostile Indians," Current goes on to tell students that the "Indians killed off the livestock in the woods and kept the settlers within the palisades" where they starved. The uprising of 1622 occurred after a period when "the Indians had given the Virginia colonists little trouble," and "the Indians pretended to be friendly."<sup>44</sup> Current thus portrays the Powhatans as congenitally hostile, cruel and treacherous—not a very subtle portrait. But equally unfortunate is Stephen Thernstrom's assertion

that the 1622 uprising occurred only because the Indians "could take no more" white expansion, and Wilson and company's assertion that the tribe decided to "lash out blindly" at the whites.<sup>45</sup> It is not terribly helpful to see the attacks simply as a response to increased settlement and missionization. The Powhatans were not responding only to Europeans; they also had in mind interest groups within the confederacy and enemies beyond it. Mary Beth Norton and her coauthors explore some of the complexities of this event, but all the other texts are content to think of it as another example of brave colonists surrounded by dangerous savages.<sup>46</sup>

The appeal of the "lonely settler in the howling wilderness" motif is made plain by a quick check of textbook descriptions of Plymouth Colony. Only three of the thirteen texts identify Squanto as the individual who stepped forward to save the colony from starvation in the spring of 1621. And of those three, only one (A People and A Nation) tells us that Squanto had previously been captured and taken to England. Without that information the Wampanoags who helped the Pilgrims appear stupid and naive. With that information--and the knowledge that Squanto returned from England in 1619 to find his village wiped out by an epidemic--we get a much fuller picture of the man and his motives.<sup>47</sup> For most authors, however, complexity of this kind only interrupts a good yarn; it is much more appealing to leave the Pilgrims erect on their pedestals, faces turned towards the "whispering primeval forest."

Textbooks also overlook the impact of interaction between tribes on Indian attitudes. Accounts of Bacon's rebellion provide one case in point. Most texts describe Virginia's frontier settlers as angry

over Indian raids, but none of the books explain that these raids were a response to white encroachment as well as to the expanding power of the Iroquois confederacy.<sup>48</sup> Armed with Dutch and English guns, the Iroquois and their allies in the fur trade set off a chain reaction of violence and expansion throughout central New York and Pennsylvania. The movement of the Susquehannas south into Virginia was a part of that larger process. Here again the best descriptions of the event--in Norton and Morison et al--tell students about the specific incident without presenting a broader, more complex view of Indian experience and motivation.<sup>49</sup> We are stuck with "raiding" Indians and "ruthless" pioneers.

When the textbooks move out of the colonial era, the problem of presenting Indians as coherent historical actors is compounded. One cannot describe Indians in the nineteenth century as if they were unaware of Europeans or unchanged by the European presence. The continual expansion of non-Indian settlements placed new pressures on tribal leaders and contributed to the rise of people who traditionally might not have been so influential. Individuals like Molly Brandt, Tecumseh, Black Hawk and John Ross were products of their eras as well as of their cultures. Changes in family and social life, religion, diet, health--all affected tribal decision-making and greatly complicated tribal life. Thus to call Tecumseh "Chief of the Shawnees" (Current et al) or to describe Cherokee removal without discussing internal conflicts among the Cherokee (Bailey and Kennedy), or to say that the Nez Perce "took to the warpath" in 1877 (Jones) is to obscure and distort historical reality.<sup>50</sup> Morrison, Commager and Leuchtenberg's statement that Indian-white relations in the late

nineteenth century were marked by "courageous defense, despair, blind savagery and inevitable defeat" typifies this narrow approach.<sup>51</sup>

When authors attempt to explain nineteenth-century Indian behavior, they usually emphasize two themes: natives as "obstacles to white settlement" or "victims of oppression."<sup>52</sup> The notion that Indians provided a "barrier to civilization" can be traced back at least to Frederick Jackson and Francis Parkman, but it continues to have appeal. For example, Bailyn et al call the Treaty of Greenville, imposed on Ohio's natives by grasping settlers "a major breakthrough" in the settlement of the Midwest. Bailey saw plains cultures as a "barrier" to expansion. Divine et al called the Indians "an obstacle," and Griggs and McCandless tell us that the Indians "posed a problem for the American settler."<sup>53</sup> But these are usually passing references; none of the authors embrace explicitly Parkman's racism or Turner's pride in westward expansion.

The "victims of expansion" model is more pervasive among these authors, probably because it is benign and it allows the them to express their outrage at official American conduct. Thus Thernstrom deplores the "ethnocentric beliefs" that led to Indian removals in the 1830s, Garraty regrets that Indians were "penned up" on reservations, and Link et al tell us that the Army "herded" tribes to the agencies.<sup>54</sup> The fullest example of textbook's use of this victim model is in The Pursuit of Liberty written by R. Jackson Wilson and six coauthors. The text's format is unusual; it alternates standard narrative chapters and case studies. Two of the case studies examine important events in Indian history--Cherokee Removal ("The Trail of Tears") and Wounded Knee. Together they provide the most detailed and

sustained discussion of nineteenth-century tribal life available in any text. The accounts are generally accurate, but they fit so neatly into the victim mold that they do little to broaden our understanding of Indian motivation and behavior. The Cherokee chapter conveys some of the broad range of conflicting motives at work within the tribe (although groups that migrated voluntarily receive no attention), but the Wounded Knee piece holds steady to the notion that by 1890 the Sioux were militarily beaten and culturally crushed. The authors ignore the fact that some tribes (such as the Crow) and Sioux bands (such as Red Cloud's Oglalas) never experienced direct defeat. They also adopt blanket language for reservation Indians, writing that "a meaningful pattern of life was almost impossible" on government preserves.<sup>55</sup> Language like this, and the assertion that Wounded Knee marked the end of "the conquest of the Sioux Indians," is perfectly reasonable if it accompanies descriptions of other aspects of tribal life, but when this is the sole detailed explanation of Indian action in the late nineteenth century, it reinforces a distorted portrait of native culture.

As victims or obstacles, Indians have no textbook existence apart from their resistance. They have no families, they do not begin cattle ranching, they do not develop new religious systems, they do not become artists. The fullness of tribal culture is lost in dramatic portraits of warriors on horseback and bodies in the snow. And the logical extension of this view is the supposition that military defeat produced what Bailyn and his coauthors call "the corruption of ... culture."<sup>56</sup> A statement historians would never support were it applied to the Germans or Italians makes sense between



the covers of a textbook where Indian cultures do not exist beyond the battlefield and native people have no motives but revenge. The books vividly reflect what Neal Salisbury has called, "a deep seated tendency to see whites and Indians as possessing two distinct species of historical experience."<sup>57</sup>

Presenting Indian peoples as coherent, multi-faceted actors in American history will require a number of changes in the standard presentations of tribal life. These changes may not necessarily mean more space must be devoted to Indians. First, authors should acknowledge that Native American cultures are nonwestern. They are rooted in the obligations of kinship rather than the appeal of political ideology. They are not individualistic, Christian or monotheistic. They are not secular; traditional values and ceremonies have both civic and religious ramifications. Moreover, distinctive (and diverse) cultural values affect a groups' reaction to military invasion, economic competition and technological change. Indian communities cannot be analyzed as if they were smaller, backward versions of European villages.

Second, authors need to recognize that the Indian encounter with Europeans was usually cumulative; each engagement, each introduction of new elements was communicated across tribal boundaries and became a factor in subsequent interaction. Third, organizers of textbook projects need to purge their books of inaccurate and misleading shorthand references that suggest Indians lack coherent motives for their actions. Indians did not "wander" or "roam." Tribes did not live in isolation. Many Indians experienced military defeat, and all Indians witnessed changes in their cultural life; these facts do not

mean that Indian cultures were necessarily destroyed or corrupted through contact with Europeans. The Trans-Mississippi West was not "unpopulated" (Divine et al), nor was it a "virgin landscape" (Norton et al) prior to white settlements.<sup>58</sup> And finally, authors should refer students explicitly to cultural anthropology, the one discipline that has attempted to understand and explain the coherency in all cultures. At present, textbook footnotes and lists of recommended readings are amazingly homogenous; few anthropologists are mentioned.

These are specific recommendations, but in all cases authors should work to avoid characterizing Indians as narrowly motivated or concerned only with European encroachments. Students will gain a coherent understanding of Indian behavior only if they see a variety of cultures and read that many motives drove Native Americans. At some times these motives drove them to war, but at many other points they prompted peace, dispersal, migration, creativity, amalgamation, revivalism or reorganization.

#### Presence and Absence

The third problem faced by textbook authors--one related to the issue of coherence--is the problem of presence and absence. Where do Indians appear in the narrative? When do they exit? Anyone who has read through a collection of texts has found an uncanny similarity in their organization. Indians appear at the time of discovery, in skirmishes accompanying early settlement, in the revolutionary war (as British allies), in descriptions of the Old Northwest and the War of 1812, during removal, at the Little Big Horn and Wounded Knee, as beneficiaries of the Indian New Deal, and as militants at Wounded Knee

II and Alcatraz. The only significant exceptions to this pattern are sections in Joseph Conlin's The American Past, Wilson et al's The Pursuit of Liberty and Norton et al's A People and A Nation that address the nature of Indian life in the colonial world.<sup>59</sup>

Not only does the typical organization reinforce the notion that Indians have no culture (after all, they only rebel, fight and complain), but it creates the impression that Indians have somehow lived apart from the history of the United States. Native Americans seem immune to the people and events described elsewhere in the textbooks. Texts ignore Indian missions or the gradual Christianization of native communities. Textbooks ignore Indian-white intermarriage and shifting patterns of native family and social life. Textbooks ignore the history of Indian farming and ranching and the evolution of Indian art. Leaders other than military leaders do not appear in these texts. There are virtually no Indian women in the texts following the death of Pocahontas (an event recorded by everyone). The long history of Indian participation in the American military fails to win attention, as does the history of Indian education, Indian law or the Indian migration to America's cities.

The greatest gap in textbook presentations of Indian life occurs in the twentieth century. For the most part Indians simply cease to exist in texts following the battle at Wounded Knee. Six of the thirteen texts examined do not mention John Collier and the "Indian New Deal" of the 1930s. While that in itself is unfortunate, most historians of modern Indian life would look for other events they consider at least as important to the story: the formation of the Society of American Indians and the National Congress of American

Indians, the founding and spread of the Native American church, the extension of educational opportunities to Indians, the rise of Indian law as a vehicle for defending tribal interests, or the sways of policy from termination to self-determination. None of the texts under review discuss these topics. By ignoring so much of contemporary Indian history, the textbook authors transform historical selectivity into a stereotype. By presenting only a part of Indian life to students, they manufacture the idea that modern Indians are silent, helpless and worthy only of pity.

The presence and absence of Indians in textbooks is typified visually in the dozens of maps included in each book. Seldom do authors add Indian tribes to their historical maps. This may not be crucial in a map of transcontinental railroad routes or Civil War battles, but maps of the Oregon boundary dispute (Bailey and Kennedy), or the extent of colonial settlement in the colonial era (Garraty) or North America following the end of the French and Indian War (Bailyn et al. and Thernstrom), or the Old Northwest on the eve of westward expansion (Divine et al) should at least contain notations that Indians were present.<sup>60</sup> Maps in the books reviewed do not. A People and A Nation was the only text to include locations of major tribes on such maps.<sup>61</sup> While one might criticize some of the placements on its maps, the author's identification of Indians in areas usually described as "wilderness" is striking when compared to the failures of other books.

If Indians have not had a "separate species of historical experience," and if they exist today, then surely they have been a continuous presence in the history of the United States. One cannot

justify the Native American's almost comical entrances and exits from the textbook narrative and be fair to the Indian experience.

### The Indian Legacy

The absence of Indians from many parts of the textbook narrative suggests a fourth and final problem: the problem of the Indian legacy. How should authors and their texts describe the Indian contribution to American history and culture? This is the most difficult issue for textbook authors to address. There are obvious physical legacies that need to be acknowledged: food, tools, clothing, words, place and animal names, games and other inventions. But far more important is the cultural legacy bequeathed to the broader society by Indians and their non-Indian neighbors. Texts have difficulty admitting that American history is not the story of one group. U.S. history is the story of many groups who met and affected one another in the North American environment. The beginning of that process of mutual influence occurred even before the first Europeans encountered their first Native Americans. When the first meetings finally occurred, it was clear this would be a plural culture, and it would develop structures, values and beliefs to account for and manage its unprecedented diversity. How a particularly American brand of pluralism evolved and subsequently affected other cross-cultural encounters is a central theme in the history of the United States. Because Indians were always here, because they were different, and because they stood at the heart of an extended process of interchange and mutual influence, their experience is a major piece of the national history.

Resolving the problem of the Indian legacy in America should aid textbook authors at both the beginning and the end of their narratives. It is not enough to write as Richard Current and his colleagues do, that the "battle between Indians and whites" is a central theme in American history, for that in itself does not suggest ways of addressing the problems of presence and absence, coherence or prehistory.<sup>62</sup> But recognizing that interaction with Indians took place in a variety of ways--both public and private--and that it contributed to an American culture that contains many, disparate groups within a single social and political unit, suggests a series of responses to other problems. If authors are going to examine Indian-white interaction in a variety of contexts then they must examine the precontact era more carefully. If that interaction consisted of more than warfare, then coherent presentations of native motivation are essential to historical understanding. And if this interaction persists and affects relations between other groups, then the narrative should be sustained and authors should avoid pretending that native cultures withered and died sometime in the nineteenth century. Coming to terms with the Indian legacy is the hardest task before textbook authors, but it is also the most exciting. Addressing this issue promises to fuel a more constructive approach to the issue of Indians in U.S. history textbooks and to open up for study a new universe of topics, people and events. Tackling the Indian legacy in America might well lead us out of our current spot.

"Correcting" textbook presentations of Indians therefore requires more than introducing new information or railing against the ignorance of authors and publishers. It requires asking again why Indians are

in U.S. history at all. Are they there as targets, or moral lessons or attractive exotics? They have seemed to be those things in the past, but today, as we reject older models and attitudes, we should seek more authentic and defensible answers. Defining a workable and honest view of the Indians' role in the development of American society and culture is the key to integrating Indian materials into courses and texts on the history of the United States. Once we recognize the centrality of American Indians to the history of our development as a national culture, we can address and resolve the many problems that have haunted the historians who write textbooks.

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## FOOTNOTES

1. Virgil J. Vogel, The Indian in American History (Chicago: Integrated Education Associates, 1968).
2. Alvin M. Josephy, Jr., "Indians in History," The Atlantic, Vol. 225, no. 6 (June, 1970), 67-72.
3. I used the December, 1983 issue of JAH and the February, 1984 issue of AHR. I am grateful to the publishers of the thirteen textbooks for providing me with review copies for this essay. The texts reviewed are listed in the bibliography.
4. For an introduction to the debate over precontact Indian populations and the impact of disease, see Henry F. Dobyns, Native American Historic Demography, Newberry Library Center for the History of the American Indian Bibliography Series (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1976), and Dobyns's essay, "Native American Population Collapse and Recovery," in Scholars and the Indian Experience, Newberry Library Center for the History of the American Indian Bibliography Series (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), p. 17-35.
5. Richard N. Current et al, American History, p. 2.
6. Thomas A. Bailey and David M. Kennedy, The American Pageant, p. 5.
7. Stephan Thernstrom, A History of the American People, p. vii-viii.
8. Ibid., p. 8.



9. Colin McEvedy and Richard Jones, Atlas of World Population History, (London: Penguin Books, 1978), p. 289.
10. Maldwyn A. Jones, The Limits of Liberty, p. 3; Samuel Eliot Morison et al, A Concise History of the American Republic, p. 7.
11. Arthur S. Link et al, A Concise History of the American People, p. 4.
12. Ibid., p. 6.
13. Bailey and Kennedy, p. 5.
14. Current, p. 16.
15. Thernstrom, p. 10.
16. Ibid., p. 10.
17. Robert A. Divine et al, America Past and Present, p. 6-7; Mary Beth Norton et al, A People and A Nation, p. 7, 11; John A. Garraty, The American Nation, p. xv.
18. While this essay is not intended as a diatribe against publishers, one deplorable practice deserves a special barb. Four of the thirteen texts under review have gone through two or more editions. Of these, the oldest (Bailey and Current) now have young authors stapled to their mastheads, insuring that they will stay in print well into the next century. By adding David Kennedy and Alan Brinkley as co-authors, the publishers have purchased a kind of textbook life insurance policy, guaranteeing themselves a continuous flow of profits, and locking another generation of students into an outdated pedagogical straitjacket. I am grateful to David Miller for bringing this practice to my attention.

19. Bernard Bailyn et al, The Great Republic, p. 5. The authors include a cursory look at precontact cultures on the eastern seaboard at the beginning of their chapter on English colonization. See p. 29.
20. Jones, p. 2-3.
21. Joseph R. Conlin, The American Past, p. 3.
22. Bailey and Kennedy, p. 5.
23. Thernstrom, p. 8.
24. Norton et al, p. 11.
25. Ibid., p. 11.
26. Robert A. Divine et al, Map i, frontpapers.
27. Link et al, p. 1.
28. Ibid., p. 5.
29. R. Jackson Wilson et al, The Pursuit of Liberty, p. 27.
30. Current et al, p. 1.
31. The prehistoric information for this and succeeding paragraphs is presented clearly and concisely in Andrew Sherratt, editor, The Cambridge Encyclopedia of Archaeology (New York: Crown Publishers/Cambridge University Press, 1980).
32. Andrew Sherratt, "Interpretation and Synthesis, A Personal View," in Ibid., p. 404.
33. Morison et al, p. 1-2.
34. Garraty, p. 9-10.
35. For a review of this literature see Jacqueline Peterson and John Anfinson, "The Indian and the Fur trade," in Scholars and the Indian Experience, pp. 223-258.
36. Thernstrom, p. 82; Current et al, p. 93.

37. Bailey and Kennedy, p. 43.
38. See, for example, Guy P. Griggs, Jr. and Perry McCandless, The Course of American History, pp. 22, 52.
39. Morison et al. p. 43; Conlin, p. 42.
40. Jones, p. 32.
41. Bailyn et al. facing p. 140.
42. Norton et al. p. 47.
43. Conlin, p. 42.
44. Current et al. p. 22, 23, 24.
45. Thernstrom, p. 24; Wilson et al. p. 63.
46. Norton et al. p. 12-16. For other treatments see, for example.  
Bailey, p. 12; Bailyn et al. p. 36; Divine et al 35-8; and  
Jones, p. 5-6.
47. Norton et al. p. 21-2.
48. See, for example, Bailyn et al. p. 110; Divine et al. p. 81; and  
Conlin, p. 53.
49. See Morison et al. p. 37 and Norton et al. p. 49.
50. Current et al. p. 229; Bailey and Kennedy, p. 245-6; Jones, p.  
183.
51. Morison et al. p. 396.
52. Morison et al. p. 395; Thernstrom, p. 430.
53. Bailyn et al. p. 264; Bailey and Kennedy, p. 522; Divine et al.  
p. 212; and Griggs and McCandless. p. 99.
54. Thernstrom, p. 258; Garraty, p. 420; and Link et al. p. 277.
55. Wilson et al. p. 486. The Cherokee and Sioux case studies appear  
as chapters 13 and 23.
56. Bailyn, p. 180.

57. Neal Salisbury, "Social and Cultural Factors in the Colonizing of Indian New England." unpublished paper in author's possession. p. 1.
58. Divine et al. p. 353; Norton et al. p. 233.
59. Conlin. p. 65; Wilson et al. p. 61-2; Norton et al. p. 47.
60. Bailey and Kennedy, p. 263; Garraty, p. 28; Bailyn et al. p. 176; Thernstrom. p. 128; Divine et al. p. 160.
61. Norton et al. p. 88.
62. Current et al. p. 35.

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